World Chronicle

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STATE OF WORLD POPULATION

Despite the spread of birth control, world population will go on growing by about 80 million a year, well into the next decade. In the latest edition of its "State of World Population", the United Nations Population Fund notes that, although the momentum of global population is slowing, world population will exceed six billion for the first time next year. In today's **World Chronicle,** Stan Bernstein discussed these latest population trends.

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ANNOUNCER: From United Nations Headquarters in New York, this is **World Chronicle**, an unedited interview programme about major global issues.

Here now to introduce our guest is the host of today's **World Chronicle**.

LITTLEJOHNS: I'm Michael Littlejohns, and this is **World Chronicle**.

The momentum of global population growth is slowing. Thanks to the efforts of the past 30 years, growth rates have fallen and will fall further in the coming decades. But because of high fertility in the past, world population is still growing by over 80 million a year. It will continue to grow at or near these levels for the next decade. What happens after that depends on action in the coming years. This and much more can be found in this year's report issued by the United Nations Population Fund entitled "The State of World Population".

Our guest today is Stan Bernstein, a Senior Technical Adviser at the United Nations Population Fund. Joining me to talk with Mr. Bernstein are Tuyet Nguyen of the *German Press Agency, DPA*, and Kristian Knutsen of *Yomiuri Shimbun*.

Mr. Bernstein, welcome to **World Chronicle.**

BERNSTEIN: Thank you very much.

LITTLEJOHNS: Mr. Bernstein, the UNFPA report is a bit like the old thing about the glass that was half empty or half full depending on how you look at it. There's progress made but still a long way to go. What more can be done to slow the momentum of population growth which is, as we said, still going at a pace of what -- 20 million year?

BERNSTEIN: Clearly there are a large number of things that can be done. One of the most important things is to make sure that people have the information and means to exercise their right to decide on how many children they want and the timing of their births and have just the number of children that they want. We know that in many parts of the world, people are having more children than they say they want and this can be addressed by information programmes and that's one of the things that we work strongly to do. But this also requires an emphasis on increased education, particularly for girls, but universal education, the universal basic education and education at higher levels will enable people to make their choices, to implement their choices, to play a more productive role in their societies. We know that gender equity and equality are absolutely important. Too often women are having more children than they want in part because of the desires of their partners, their communities, their lack of alternative definitions of their own value and worth and so increased education, increased support to women's equality is a vital thing which will also increase age of marriage which plays a big role in slowing the pace of population momentum.

LITTLEJOHNS: How does the Population Fund operate? Do you send doctors and nurses into the field? Do you hand out contraceptive devises to men and women? How do

you go about it?

BERNSTEIN: We don't do it ourselves. What we do is we provide technical support and financial support to countries to implement their own programmes and what we do is we work with them to see that they follow the basic principles – the human rights principles and understandings – that are in the United Nations conferences that have given our mandate detail and permanence.

LITTLEJOHNS: How much resistance do you encounter from governments – perhaps not all governments feel that population should be controlled?

BERNSTEIN: We don't see ourselves in the business of controlling populations. We see ourselves in the business of giving people the ability to control their own choices and make their own decisions. Governments vary in their attitudes towards what their rate of population growth is and this is something that depends on their local circumstance and their local concerns. Most countries in the world believe that their population is growing faster than their capacity to provide for people and so they ask for assistance to implement programmes to moderate that. A small number of countries think their population growth rates are not high enough. This is particularly an after effects of wars or social disruption that these occurs. What the Fund seeks to do is to work with governments and to provide to them the resources and technical assistance that they need to implement their own policies.

NGUYEN: Mr. Bernstein, the UN reports that there are one million young people from the age 15 to 24. It's a huge mass of population for the world. I think it's really unprecedented. Can you explain how it comes to that number and the impact on society in the next few years.

BERNSTEIN: The numbers are as large as they are because of the higher fertility rates that existed in the recent past. In 1960 for example, people in the developing world were having on average six children in their families. Now globally, it's down to about three but it's higher in many of the Least Developed Countries. So here you have this large momentum, this enormous number of people who were born 15 to 24 years ago for the age group that you mentioned and so now, what we find is, it's necessary for societies to get very serious about making sure that they provide for the needs of these people in education, in health, in employment and other basic social services.

NGUYEN: What does it involve now? You know the economy of the world, in general, is declining while the mass of young people is growing? Is there a way to meet both sides? Can the economy provide for the mass of young people to grow and work?

BERNSTEIN: Many countries are having difficulty in meeting that challenge which is one reason why they are interested in population and reproductive health

programmes. It's not just an issue of how many people there are but it's also the quality of the life that they live and what their state of health is in the areas with regard to reproduction, whether they are having children or not. The current financial difficulties globally are due to a wide variety of causes, different people have pointed to different things. We know the need for regulatory systems, for good governance, for open financial systems, some sort of regulation of the ease of flow of funds across international borders. All of these will be a part of solving this problem. But it's also the case that the large number of people that we have, in addition to being a challenge, because if these people cannot be gainfully employed, if these people can't be given the means to earn a livelihood, we could have serious social disruption. There is also an opportunity. Because what we have now is a demographic bonus coming up from many parts of the world. Because fertility rates have been declining within the recent three decades, there is a growing proportion of populations that have people of working age. So this 15 to 24 year old group, they are now entering their working years, they are entering their reproductive years. Our ability to provide for these people is absolutely essential in deciding what that eventual number of people we have is going to be and what the quality of their life is going to be.

NGUYEN: But do you think governments have enough programme and quality programme to meet the needs of young people right now?

BERNSTEIN: I think we know that the needs of young people have not been given adequate attention. They have not been able to meet all of the needs in many countries. We know that youth unemployment is a very serious problem all over the world – developed countries and developing countries alike. Some of it is the need to adopt policies that enable this group to be productive – to make their own jobs if there aren't jobs there. We know that it does not take an awful lot of money to provide for the basic reproductive health needs of this large population yet it has been under served even in countries that have been very successful in providing a lot of people information and services. Young population tend to be under served.

KNUTSEN: How do you tailor your message on reproductive education to account for gender differences. For example, how do you increase a sense of responsibility among young men?

BERNSTEIN: Working with young men is absolutely vital. We are involved in giving support to programmes that the number of countries are doing to increase gender sensitivity training in their schools – to teach young men to be more respectful of women, to break down the stereotyped role expectations of aggressive young men being, shall we say, particularly seductive or worst aggressive, with regard to young women. This is a vital part of

education systems. We have family life education programmes that we support now in over 150 countries or built in to these curricula are very important lessons on mutual respect between boys and girls. We are increasing the information about male methods of contraceptive. We have been working on programmes that, for example, would set up men only clinics. One reason that men have not been that interested in reproductive health services is that most of them have been oriented historically to women and men feel uncomfortable in going to clinics where there are only women around, many of them bringing their babies for other services as well. We think involving men, having them support the choices of their partners and having methods for themselves are very vital.

KNUTSEN: Another aspect of reproductive education in your report is the idea of peer education basically harnessing the natural pressures that kids put on other kids -- young adults -- in the service of reducing unwanted pregnancies, this type of thing. Can you talk a little bit how that was developed and how it works?

BERNSTEIN: Sure. It has been quite successful in a number of places where it has been done. I can give you an example of a programme in the Philippines where youth themselves set up a telephone hotline where people with questions can call in and speak to other youth who have been trained, who can give information. They also go out to inter schools. There are a variety of these kinds of programmes and projects that have interaction between trained youth and their colleagues to instill in them a sense of responsibility for their actions in this area. We know that when youth deal with youth about these kinds of issues, there's a greater receptivity because the feeling is they are being listened to. Their opinions and their views are being taken seriously, not necessarily judgmentally, and when you trust young people and give them information to make responsible decisions, they are more likely to do that.

LITTLEJOHNS: Mr. Bernstein, China has what some people might consider to be a rather draconian policy of one child per family in order to hold down their population growth. What does UNFPA think about that? Is that something that you would endorse?

BERNSTEIN: UNFPA's principles are absolutely certain and explicit. We believe in voluntary choice. People should have the ability to decide the number of children and the timing of those births. We have worked with the Chinese in our small programme in China to ensure that they incorporate the principle of voluntarism in their programme. Many Chinese already want small numbers of children and do not need coercion. If there is any coercion, it should be eliminated. And that's how the Fund feels and that's how we deal with the Chinese. We have helped them in this regard. We have provided them with more effective contraception so that people can make choices and actually have those choices come

about. We have started programmes in thirty of the poorest provinces which we are going to monitor very closely to demonstrate to them that pure voluntarism will attain the policy goals that they have that they attempted to bring about by that policy. We have been teaching their demographers for years. They do not need that policy. Fortunately, they are not enforcing it in a way that they used to. Coercion is utterly unacceptable as far as the International Community is concerned.

LITTLEJOHNS: There is a suspicion among certain elements in Washington that UNFPA has been encouraging or helping abortion programmes in China. What's your response to that?

BERNSTEIN: The UNFPA does not support abortion in any way. Abortion is not a method of family planning. We believe that the way to prevent abortion is to make sure that people have access and information about safe and effective means of family planning.

LITTLEJOHNS: This is **World Chronicle.** Our guest is Stan Bernstein, a Senior Technical Adviser at the United Nations Population Fund.

NGUYEN: Mr. Bernstein, on the other spectrum of the population is the aging population also, those over 65, continue to grow and people can now live until 80-85 years of age. How did you see that also affect the economy of the world?

BERNSTEIN: Well, it poses some challenges and it poses some possibilities. I mean, there are a number of things that have to be done with regard to older populations. Just as we need to provide basic social services for young populations to prepare them, we have to also teach people to plan through their life for their old age. To adopt health habits in their younger ages that can assure that they have healthy older ages so they can be more active, more contributory parts of their community, so that they can, as development improves and increases, use their own private resources or public resources to support unfamiliar resources so that they are properly supported and can live dignified and respectful and contributory old ages.

NGUYEN: Do you think governments outside the industrialized world, I mean the European countries, do they have programmes that has really helped old people to continue a decent living?

BERNSTEIN: More and more countries are, as they have larger older populations, realizing that they are going to have to do something with regards to for example, pensions. We know that only about 30 percent of the world's older population is covered by any kind of pension fund, whether it be publicly oriented or privately oriented, and that only about 40 percent of the world's population is contributing to some sort of scheme of this type. But 155 countries do have some kind of pension arrangement – a public pension arrangement

of some kind. Coverage is, unfortunately, all too low. Families are the major providers of support for older people.

NGUYEN: You are talking about the developing world not the ...

BERNSTEIN: Yes, absolutely, in the developing world. In the more developed countries there are far more elaborate public programmes. There are pension schemes, insurance schemes a wide variety of ways that communities try to help provide for their older people, though they also have been faced recently with budgetary cutbacks and are relying more heavily on local communities. If I could just finish responding to that, I think one thing that the Report emphasizes is that governments can assist communities in providing local services. That there are a lot of things that can be done beyond just the balance of family but involving local communities and Non-Governmental Organizations so that it's possible to increase the security of people in their older years and see that they have a better life.

KNUTSEN: An issue you raised in the Report discusses the instances of discrimination against the elderly, of elderly abuse coming from all areas of the world including areas where you would normally think you would see high regard for the elderly. Is that what we have to afford to in terms of if we fail the world's populations?

BERNSTEIN: If we fail to put appropriate policies and appropriate monitoring systems in place, that is a distinct possibility. There will be more people of older ages and we have to see that society plans for giving them a safe and secure livelihoods in the future.

KNUTSEN: Why are women more susceptible to that form of discrimination.

BERNSTEIN: Well, for one, women are a larger proportion of the elderly. Women live longer than men do for a variety of biological reasons. And women frequently find themselves, for example, left behind when younger people move to cities. They can be left in the rural countryside with insufficient means to provide for their own support. In some countries there are five times as many widows as there are widowers in the older years because of the differences in life expectancy, so we think that older women are multiply burdened and are particularly challenged because they have been disadvantaged through their lives. Frequently, they were not as well educated when they were younger, they did not have access to resources to credit. They did not own property or were not as involved in making decisions. Through the course of their lives, frequently, in many societies, it's the men who really controls the resources, and they find themselves in their older years at a significant disadvantage. We think that the condition of young women is – young women and old women are linked – that the kind of life we prepare young women for determines the kind of life that they will have as older women and we need to give special attention to this.

LITTLEJOHNS: Mr. Bernstein, speaking about discrimination that the other end of

the age scale countries like India and Pakistan and I guess, there must be others, have discriminatory attitude toward girl babies. They want more boy babies and sometimes girl babies, if they are not killed, at least are not given the same attention that boy babies receive. Does UNFPA have any policy to discourage this kind of conduct?

BERNSTEIN: Absolutely. UNFPA is a very strong advocate for equitable and equal treatment of boys and girls and for the elimination of a variety of abuses whether it be discrimination in provision of health, food and safety, discrimination in the provision of education. We are strong advocates on working all countries to make sure that there is gender equity and equality. For us this is the bottom line. Unless this is attained, many of the other things we are trying to do will just be complicated or made impossible.

NGUYEN: The world population now is 5.8 billion people, would be what, 6 billion people by the middle of next year?

BERNSTEIN: Yes.

NGUYEN: Can you give us an idea of where that trend is going? Is there a saturation point where – you know – that's all the world can handle.

BERNSTEIN: People have been arguing at the question as to how many people can the earth support for a long time now and a number of very insightful people have written about that question. When you push the question that way, though, you make it sound as though we are already providing what's needed for the 5.9 billion people that are on the planet right now. We are not even successfully meeting the basic needs of those people. There are more than a billion people living in extreme poverty in the world. It's projected now that the world population in 2050 will reach about 9.4 billion people. There are, of course, different projections. Some are as low as 7.7, others as high as 11.1 billion people and that's just a little over 50 years from now.

NGUYEN: Does that mean that the number of poor will grow instead of declining.

BERNSTEIN: Well, a number of countries had made significant progress in reducing the proportion of their people who are poor. We can look at Indonesia and the Philippines, for example. But we also can look and see that the recent financial distress in Asia has undone probably more than twenty years of progress that governments had made. Fortunately, the fact that the governments were investing in the health and education of their populations means that their recovery from the current economic conditions might be faster than it otherwise would have been.

KNUTSEN: One more controversial suggestions in your Report regards immigration, in terms of asking those states to adopt more liberal immigration policies. How

do you sell this idea, given the strong feelings this issue tends to raise in a developed world?

BERNSTEIN: The Report recognizes that there is sensitivities about migration in most countries both in sending countries and receiving countries. We don't strongly recommend migration particularly, but we do acknowledge the fact that it is an option. It is one of the possibilities that the more developed countries might adopt if they find that they are having difficulties in the growth of their labour force relative to the size of their older populations, for example. It's a policy that they have adopted at various times in the past. Sometimes for shorter periods, sometimes for longer periods. We recognize that this is something that countries have to decide on their own but we want to point out to them that it is indeed a policy option but it of course, accelerating the development of the sending countries, is absolutely vital both to reduce the pressure for increased migration for those who are concerned about high levels and also to make sure then that people do have an opportunity should they want to go back to return to a country with accelerating development.

LITTLEJOHNS: Mr. Bernstein, here at the United States sex education in the schools is quite a controversial matter. But your Report says "the evidence is that sex education promotes responsibility rather than promiscuity". Would you like to elaborate on that?

BERNSTEIN: Certainly. There are a lot of people who are concerned that if you give young people information about sex and reproduction, that really all you are doing is giving them a how-to manual as it were. But that is not what sex education really is. It's teaching people about responsibility. Teaching people about what the risks are in sexual behaviour is also an important part of this instruction. Giving them an opportunity to review and think through the values that are relevant to them in making these choices is also very important and a number of studies have been done, many of them in more developed countries including the United States, that clearly show that sex education -- that can include abstinence training and information about contraception -- reduces the number of sexual partners that young people have, increases the age at which sexual activity begins and generally promotes more responsible behaviour.

NGUYEN: Is there an estimate of how much governments, in general, spend on population? I mean, health education, health reproduction, and so on.

BERNSTEIN: At the International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo in 1994, we developed an estimate of what an amount of resources will be needed for population and reproductive health programmes for the entire world over the next twenty years and for the year 2000 it will require 17 billion dollars a year. Our latest best information suggests that's just a bit over 10 billion dollars per year we have spent in the most recent year

for which we have information which was 1996. Most of this money is being spent by the developed countries themselves. Only about 2 billion of this is in the form of international assistance. Countries are increasing the amount of money and the amount of personal resources and institutional resources that they give to population and reproductive health programmes but we still have a way to go.

LITTLEJOHNS: Mr. Bernstein, we are almost out of time but on a positive note, do you think that you are winning the campaign for reducing population growth?

BERNSTEIN: It's not just a question of population growth that's an issue. I think there are still challenges ahead. There is also the issue of providing for population age groups in different ways. There's also a question of making sure that the quality of life of the number that we have is as good as it can be, whatever that number is.

LITTLEJOHNS: Mr. Bernstein, that's all the time we have. Thank you for being with us on this edition of **World Chronicle.** Our guest has been Stan Bernstein, a Senior Technical Adviser at the United Nations Population Fund. He was interviewed by Tuyet Nguyen of the *German Press Agency, DPA,* and Kristian Knutsen of *Yomiuri Shimbun*. I'm Michael Littlejohns. Thank you for joining us. We invite you to be with us for the next edition of **World Chronicle**.